

This is a printer friendly version of an article from the **The Olympian**

To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Community gardeners plot assistance for food bank

By Katherine Tam

The Olympian

OLYMPIA — With the extra acre it's leasing, Garden-Raised Bounty thinks it can triple production and increase the amount of vegetables it donates to the Thurston County Food Bank.

▫ Members of the Washington Conservation Corps think they can grow at least 3,000 to 4,000 pounds of food on land by Black Lake, where they're launching a "giving garden." Sarah Brewer, 13, of Olympia said she hopes she can put the excess food her family grows in their backyard to community use.

On Monday night, about 20 growers and backyard gardeners thought of ways to help the food bank feed its growing client base and diversify the produce it offers. Attendees ranged from groups who have given to the food bank before to individuals hoping someone else can benefit from their green thumbs and surplus crops.

"If you think of how many small gardens there are out there that have some extra, it adds up," Brewer said. "We grow food for us, but we don't eat all that we grow. A lot goes to waste or to compost."

Growers took commitment forms they'll use to put in writing what they'll grow and how much they'll harvest. GRuB will collect the responses and organize the effort. The group is working closely with the food bank and Gleaners, whose volunteers harvest or pick up crops at farms that are low on manpower and deliver the produce to the food bank. Gleaners moved 10,000 pounds to the food bank last year.

That kind of aid, for example, could help volunteers with the Kiwanis Food Bank Garden, which has been operating since 1992 and last year donated 15,000 pounds of food. Club member Don Leaf said tapping the Gleaners' harvesting resources could increase the club's chances of providing a firm commitment that can produce more.

GRuB organized the first food bank growers meeting Monday after learning that more low-income people were using the food bank.

Client visits have increased 30 percent a month during the past seven months, said Robert Coit, executive director at the food bank. That's due in part to higher gasoline prices, which have forced residents to use more of their paychecks in order to drive to work, and the opening of satellite sites at the city's two largest low-income apartment complexes.

"We don't expect our client counts to decline," Coit said. "We're just reaching people we haven't reached before."

The food bank gets a lot of its produce from growers, but donations ebb in the cold months. Now is a prime example: Coit said he has potatoes but no other produce. He uses cash donations and reserves to buy produce from grocery stores.

In addition, the food bank is looking for more variety in the donations it receives, he said.

"It would be great if we could get more organized so we don't all grow zucchini," he said. "I have no problem with zucchini, but we don't all have to grow zucchini."

GRuB hopes to have an annual organizing meeting where growers plan who grows what and how to meet the food bank's needs, said Blue Peetz, co-director.

Vegetables can be grown year-round in this region, including in the winter, he said. Groups with greenhouses, such as GRuB and the Washington Conservation Corps, can grow food in a protected environment.
